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ABSTRACT

A conference on minority rights and training held in Gatwick, England, in April 1997 had the following purposes: (1) to explore training about minority rights and the need to make majorities aware of minority rights and attitudes that improve cooperation between communities; and (2) to look at the need for and possibilities of training relief professionals. The main issues discussed in the minority training workshop centered on five themes: the relative merits of local, regional, and international initiatives; is the need for information, awareness raising, or training?; what should training be about?; who should be trained?; and learning from positive and negative experiences. The workshop on training relief professionals working in conflict situations identified seven key areas that might bring positive results: effective tools for relief organizations to identify communities and assess needs; a database of experts on relevant issues; training of relief professionals in a variety of organizations; networking meetings among experts and organizations; more consideration of how to choose local partners; extending training to the wider society; and developing indicators for monitoring progress. (KC)

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Minority Rights 1997–2000

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Report of an International MRG Seminar

SEMINAR REPORT

Background to the Seminar

Minority Rights Group (MRG)'s strategy emphasizes that one of our principal activities is to move beyond standard-setting and to seek ways to enable minority communities to voice their own concerns via advice, information and training. We convened this seminar as part of this strategy and because of the number of training requests we were receiving from organizations or individuals with whom we were working or were in contact. Over the last two years, MRG has started to provide training and, more importantly, to help others provide training; as we became known for this, more and more organizations and individuals approached us for help. Not only did we not have sufficient resources to work with all of these people, but we were unaware of many other training providers in this area to whom we could refer people.

As an organization which has come relatively recently to training work, we felt that we should establish how far other organizations were providing relevant training and bring together a group of people to consider the priorities from among the training requests we were receiving. As can be seen from the full list of participants printed at the end of this seminar report, a wide range of individuals, including members of minority communities, activists, advocates, relief professionals and trainers accepted our invitation to meet and discuss these issues over two days in April 1997.

The field of minority rights and training may seem specialized but it can cover many different aspects and audiences. It is a common assumption that it is only minorities who need training on minority rights or minority issues. This is incorrect. The need to make members of majorities aware of minority rights and attitudes that improve cooperation between communities is equally important – if not more so. Given the numbers involved in majority communities, to have any impact key groups need to be identified. MRG was aware of some training programmes involving groups such as government officials, the judiciary, lawyers or the police. We therefore decided to consider one area where we could find no existing training provision, but where we suspected (as a result of previous research) that a training need might exist: the training of relief professionals working in areas of conflict. Thus we designed the seminar so that most of the time was spent in two working groups: one to consider the training needs and potential training opportunities for members of minority communities, and the other looking at the need for and possibilities of training relief professionals.

MRG researched and produced background papers for each of the working groups. For Workshop A on training for members of minority communities, we used our networks to contact a number of organizations that we hoped might be providing training relevant to members of minority communities. As a result of this research, we had planned to produce a directory of available training relevant to minority rights which we could disseminate through our networks to ensure that minorities could get the training that they felt they needed. However, of the 60 organizations that we contacted, 29 were not involved in any training or were unable to give any details; 27 were providing human rights or conflict resolution training but either did not

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include any aspect of minority rights, (or did so only as a small part of a much larger and more wide ranging course). Only four organizations provided training tailored to minority issues and in some of these cases, the training was targeted at or only available to specific audiences such as government officials or the police. Furthermore, it took an MRG intern over six weeks of phoning and faxing to complete this exercise. Most members of minority communities would not have the resources to spend so long searching for suitable training and, since most of the training available only dealt with minority rights as one element of a wider training subject, it was difficult to gauge how relevant any one training course may be to a potential trainee's needs. The results of this process (although by no means conclusive) tend to indicate that MRG is not duplicating the work of others in its training provision on this specific area and that it will be difficult to identify others ready to provide training tailored to the needs of minority communities in the short term. The background paper for the workshop on the training of minority communities set out the results of this research and some key questions that the workshop could consider.

In terms of training for majorities, MRG chose the training of relief professionals for Workshop B, because we suspected that a training need (or knowledge or awareness need) existed. In 1996, MRG contributed four case studies concerning minority or indigenous communities to the UNICEF Machel Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (these studies will shortly be published by MRG as a Report). The research for two of these studies – the Roma in the former Yugoslavia and minorities in Somalia – indicated that minority communities who were not directly involved in the fighting could be overlooked in relief and reconstruction efforts. We wanted to test this further with a group of relief professionals and to determine whether this represented a training need or whether there were other factors preventing relief workers from considering and reaching minorities. The background paper set out some of the evidence we had gathered in our limited research and posed some questions for the workshop to consider.

Opening session

MRG's Chair, Sir John Thomson, welcomed everyone to the event and set out the background to the seminar; he stressed that the seminar should be seen as part of a process, rather than as an isolated event. It was important that the discussions were fed into MRG's existing plans on training and identified practical steps that MRG and others could take to address the concerns that arose out of discussion of diverse needs, experiences and backgrounds. He explained that MRG is a small organization and to have an impact it must work as a catalyst, working alongside others.

Alan Phillips, MRG's Executive Director, gave details of MRG's current training activities which include:

- A minority rights and advocacy training programme linked to the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Minorities. As well as a three-day training and discussion event immediately prior to the UN Working Group on Minorities, participants attend the Working Group where they are also supported in making presentations to this body. Another integral part of this programme is the facilitation of local and regional follow-up training activities run by the participants, and two three-month internships at MRG's offices in London. This programme is aimed at members of minority communities.
- A training of trainers workshop linked to the Central European University in Budapest in July 1997, aimed at experienced minority rights activists in Central and Eastern Europe. The three-day training event organized in consultation with MRG's partners in the region aims to build training skills and support the participants' advocacy activities. It immediately follows a two-week course on minority rights law organized by the university in conjunction with MRG.
- A two-year programme to work with Roma organizations in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia to provide leadership and mentoring training to young Roma working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This programme aims to establish a system for the acquisition and transfer of specific expertise and technical skills for this community.
- MRG will also be involved in UNESCO's CONFINTEA V event on adult education, which is taking place in Hamburg in July 1997, and is organizing a round table at that event on minority rights and adult education.

José Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate, was the first guest speaker of the seminar. He described his arrival at the UN in New York two decades ago when he had little diplomatic experience and a limited knowledge of its structures or negotiation practices. He stressed how important it was to have good information on which to base interventions and arguments and indicated how

José Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate, at MRG's launch of the World Directory of Minorities, *London, April 1997.*

useful MRG's early Report on East Timor (first published in 1979) had been when he began campaigning. He explained how he had been able to gain support from other Portuguese-speaking representatives at the UN from newly independent states such as Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique. He also described how he had learnt from bitter experience lessons in hypocrisy and self interest from those representing key states at the UN.

Despite gaining significant victories such as the unanimous resolution of the Security Council that the rights of the East Timorese should be respected, which described the Indonesian invasion as aggression, he recalled his occasional doubts as to whether to continue attempting to work through an organization such as the UN. However, he said that he believed that the effort and disappointments were worth it; and that the UN should not be ignored.

Having worked to raise the East Timorese issue for over 25 years, he stated that global communications increased the vulnerability of oppressive states, because information (especially film and photographs) of atrocities could be widely circulated quickly and easily; states could no longer deny the accuracy of the information. Thus he felt communications and information, as well as training, were instrumental to progress in minority rights.

José Ramos-Horta ended by pointing out that the East Timorese people had survived the Indonesian invasion and subsequent events, and that he had continued working while five presidents came and went in the United States of America (USA), and while Thatcher, Major, Mitterrand and Chirac were in power in Britain and France. He argued that the sheer determination of the East Timorese people, and others like them, and the power of ideas, would prevail over hypocrisy and intransigence in the international system.

Challenges and limitations of training

Maya Daruwala spoke from her five years' experience as a trainer with the National Centre for Advocacy Studies in Delhi, India, while also including her experience as a Director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in India. She explored issues such as the deeper spiritual dimension of training and stressed that it must not be seen simply as a process of information sharing, technique or capacity building. She also stressed that training must be seen in context and gave some indications of the complexity of Indian society with its great diversity of peoples, giving rise to many facets of individual identity and many ideas of inclusion and exclusion in relation to caste, class and gender, as well as ethnicity, minority/majority status and religion.

Maya Daruwala identified three main training challenges in the Indian context. First, to change subjects into citizens. This is to change the way that people think about themselves through advocacy skills, consciousness-raising, leadership training and legal literacy. Second, she pointed out the usefulness of sharing with people possible ways into institutions and ways of bending the institutions to meet their needs, as well as the importance of building on peoples' abilities and of strategic planning. Third, she noted that it was important to consider who should be targeted and mentioned opinion formers such as the media and judiciary as well as activists and minorities. Fourth, she said that evaluation is a vital component of training in developing programmes and ensuring the best use of resources.

Drawing to a close, Maya Daruwala shared some points on the limitations of training that she had considered during her career. She raised a question and a caution on the term 'training' (which was supported by many other participants throughout the discussions in the workshops). Training is a generic term which would rarely be useful in describing a particular activity, such as mentoring, or skill sharing. It can be read as simply meaning the passing of knowledge from trainer to trainee, but it should describe a mutual process of sharing abilities, experience, knowledge and skills, as well as having a spiritual dimension. She posed the concern that training might subvert other more radical but perhaps more effective ways of addressing inequalities and put forward the view that trainers need to be part of a broad-based campaign. She raised the question of whether leadership can be entirely taught or whether individuals need to have a particular gift to be successful leaders. She also asked how much training would be necessary before a critical mass for change would be reached and, returning to her discussion of space within institutions, coined the phrase 'angle of incision' to describe the process of identifying how to effect change while encountering the least resistance.

Ways forward

Gudmundur Alfredsson completed the opening plenary session by suggesting MRG's next moves. He saw three immediate ways forward: for MRG to provide more training itself, for MRG to seek to influence other human rights training institutions to adjust or augment their existing training provision, and for MRG to produce training materials. If MRG was to continue and expand its training programme, it could consider moving into new areas such as the training of judges and other officials or could seek to establish longer term (three to five years) training programmes to include training at national and international levels.

The three presentations during the opening session gave rise to a number of questions and issues which were carried forward to the two working groups for further discussion.

The first session of the workshop on the training of minorities to advocate their rights in national, regional and international bodies, focused on the training needs expressed by minority communities. Delegates shared experiences and gave examples from their own backgrounds of these needs. The discussions were lively and sometimes heated, and a large number of topics and situations were covered. It was noteworthy that delegates had widely different experiences of work in international, regional and local bodies and as trainers, and were able to put forward the views of many diverse communities.

The main issues during this session centred on five themes:

- The relative merits of local, regional, and international initiatives.
- Is the need expressed a need for information, awareness-raising or training?
- What should training be about?
- Who should be trained?
- Learning from positive and negative experiences.

Throughout the discussions on these five themes, a consensus around several issues emerged. It was clear that training decisions and design must include the potential

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beneficiaries in a central role. Trainers and training must be flexible enough to respond to trainees' different contexts, needs and priorities. Training must link directly to peoples' perceptions of their problems and must show how ideas and experiences shared in training can be used to address these problems.

The relative merits of local, regional and international initiatives

It was felt that training provided at local, regional and international levels would address different audiences and meet different training needs. Therefore it was important to establish the differences and relative merits of training at the different levels. It was felt that training at the local or national level is extremely important since it is only at this level that training can be tailored to address the specific needs and situation of a particular minority community. Local training initiatives also play an important role in recruiting people, especially the young, to work on issues facing a minority community. It was felt that work at this level to influence and unite people, and have an input into legislation, is beneficial in its own right. However it is also an essential pre-condition for work at the regional and international levels.

Furthermore, it was recognized that regional training initiatives create a different, yet useful opportunity to share experiences among groups in similar situations. In this way, participants can learn about effective approaches to particular problems as well as ways of tackling problems through discussion and creatively criticizing experiences and techniques. A by-product of regional training can be the creation of regional networks whereby relatively isolated communities can gain and give mutual support, and feedback. They can also share information and strategies outside of a training context in the long term.

Programmes at the international level on the UN and its mechanisms, for example, are important since they bring into contact people from very diverse situations and backgrounds who, nonetheless, have some common issues or goals. International programmes also give the opportunity to address international instruments (i.e. international legislation) in more detail. As with regional training, long term networks and contacts can be generated from international training programmes.

Above all it was felt to be essential that training at one level was linked to action at the other levels, so that the participants at regional and international training events could bring their experience of training and working on minority issues to those meetings. Conversely, what is learned at the international or regional level could also be used at the local level. This could imply a tension between the universal and the particular, but it was felt that such a tension would be creative rather than destructive.

Kosovo/a, Serbia. Albanian women's group meeting in Has.

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Is the need expressed a need for information, awareness-raising or training?

This discussion arose out of concerns expressed about the term 'training' echoing those made by Maya Darnwala during her opening presentation. Training was seen as implying 'teaching' minorities and teaching was seen as a paternalistic, one-way approach rather than a dialogue. Many participants felt that the information that minority communities needed was difficult to obtain, despite modern communication equipment (which is not available to all), and might be more useful than training. Others argued that training need not be paternalistic and can involve minority communities in exercising choice and responsibility through participation in training as trainers, training design and commissioning. Multiple packages of information were needed so that minorities could use those most relevant to their needs. It was also pointed out, however, that training is not about simply passing on information, but is a long term process of skill and/or confidence-building through the exchange of information and ideas in which trainees learn from each other and the trainer learns and listens as well as the trainees.

Although some delegates expressed a clear need for training materials, other participants were worried that information packs, documents or training programmes produced outside the area concerned would be based on those experts' values rather than values familiar to and relevant to the minority community. Such materials were likely to be rejected by those they were intended to help.

Although the discussion in the workshop concentrated on training for, by and with members of minority communities, it was stressed that training minorities alone would not solve minority problems. Training must also be targeted at majority communities in general and at key personnel such as judges, local government officers and the police in particular.

What should training be about?

It was clear that no standard programme could meet all the needs of differing communities, but that trainers and trainees should work together to draw up agendas and adapt and create programmes as necessary. It was noted that many methods of identification, implementation and monitoring of rights are imperfect, and members of minority communities may (with justification) feel they are of little use. However, it was also noted that training could be empowering and that rights must be taken and are not given. It was also recognized that training could be: immediate (how to deal with current minority problems which could be a matter of life or death); medium term (which might include skill development and advocacy strategies); to long term (breaking down ideas of 'enemies' and 'friends', and beginning to think inclusively rather than exclusively). It was felt that all training must include ways of encouraging minority communities to value their own knowledge and consider what such communities can offer to others rather than what they can be trained in. One issue that was felt to be important over a wide range of communities was training to enhance skills and confidence in lobbying, to influence those with authority and responsibility in a variety of settings.

Who should be trained?

It was noted that the vast majority of training opportunities are in English. This is difficult for those communities where English is not widely spoken. Linguistic minority communities often learn national majority languages as second and third language as well as their minority mother tongue, and may then need to learn another regional or international language which may well not be English. If all training and training materials are in English participants will be selected by their organizations because of their language ability rather than because of their potential as future trainers or their interest or experience in this area. Other communities may be entirely excluded from training programmes. Against this must be offset the practical difficulties of offering training in several languages or identifying trainers speaking minority languages, especially in the international context.

It was also felt extremely important that there be some continuity in those who are trained so that participants attend more that one session of training and are offered support after or between training sessions. Those who have attended one or more sessions should be invited back to make presentations and support those attending for the first time.

Learning from positive and negative experiences

There was much agreement among the participants that the exchange of positive experiences in advocating rights is extremely useful, particularly for examples of best practice at the local level. It was suggested that instead of stressing negative experiences, minorities could share ways in which solutions were found and it was recognized that it could be stimulating to hear how others have made progress even though all situations are different. It was also clearly important that trainers and those participating in training evaluate the effectiveness of any training event in both the short and longer term.

In the second session of this workshop, discussion returned to these main themes which were refined during the debate to result in the following main agreements:

Recommendations

- Training programmes should be based in local initiatives taking into consideration local perceptions of the problems and the training needs.
- Ways should be sought to link the local, regional and international levels to form a cycle of activity. For example, starting with a local initiative, taking ideas and issues arising from that initiative to an international event, then bringing back to the local level ideas and experience from the international level, along with those brought to the international level from other regions.
- Training must be followed up with other support and activities. Those participating in training should be encouraged to act as trainers locally or at subsequent international events.
- Trainers and training providers need to consider the issue of language and investigate ways of providing training in languages other than English where possible.
- Training must be provided for majorities as well as minorities.
- Training and exchange of ideas on advocacy strategies and skills is useful, especially if it involves the exchange of positive solutions to past problems.

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UN relief supplies for southern Sudan, Lokichokkio, northern Kenya.

Workshop B

Training and relief professionals working in conflict situations

In this workshop participants agreed that relief does not always reach minorities. The discussions of the group centred on how to improve practice in order to reach minorities.

The group considered reasons why relief was not reaching minorities and identified the following issues:

- Lack of awareness among relief organizations of the existence of minority communities and the situation they are facing.
- Lack of awareness of methods of identifying minority communities, assessing their needs and negotiating within local structures to meet them.
- Lack of access since minorities may be in remote areas. access in conflict situations may be dependent on being able to gain the cooperation of authorities or militias, and there may be very real security problems.
- Lack of will on the part of agencies and their staff to tackle the issue.

The following were all considered to be helpful steps which would begin to address the above:

- In order to raise awareness, more research should be undertaken to demonstrate to relief organizations where a community's needs have not been met.
- To ensure that attention is given to minority groups, policies and guidelines of agencies should address the specific needs of minorities.
- To support the awareness-raising process and help move from awareness to action, examples of good practice should be documented to show that it is possible to meet minorities' needs.
- A sense of shared responsibility could be created by meetings of concerned organizations to learn from each others' good and bad practice.
- Ways of assessing the work of organizations in this area need to be developed and organizations need to be persuaded to implement them.
- It was also acknowledged that organizations must consider a local partner's attitude to minorities within the partner's community when choosing partners and setting up partnership agreements.

It was noted that with many development bodies currently looking at issues such as accountability and evaluation of their work, there was a climate in which the question of aid reaching minorities could be raised and would be listened to.

In its second session, the group divided up so that four different possible audiences for training could be considered in more detail: development organizations; governmental and non-governmental donors, including UN agencies; human rights organizations, including local partners; and relief and emergency organizations. Other potential audiences were identified such as the media and civil society in general but the group did not look into these in any detail. Each sub-group was then asked to address who will be trained, the kinds of training needed, the kinds of material needed and who would do the training?

For development organizations, it was felt useful to train fieldworkers in issues such as skills and organizational

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development, empowerment and the need to develop civil society and accountability, using case studies and examples of good practice. In particular the issues of training on achieving new ways of more inclusive participation, raising legal literacy and finding mechanisms whereby staff can witness and report on human rights abuses without putting existing work at risk, were all considered important.

For governmental and non-governmental donors, including UN agencies, it was seen as essential to ensure that they adopt policies which are sensitive to minorities. They could then be provided with an information pack including case studies, good and bad practice examples and ideas for exercises to use during training; however, the agencies would be expected to use their internal training departments to provide training. It was thought that the training for this audience might include sensitivity and awareness-training, good methodologies and ways of building real commitment so that new methods do not fall at the first hurdle.

For human rights organizations and partners, the need for mutual information-sharing was identified from the local level to the international and vice versa. It was felt that local human rights groups could be very powerful if they included minority rights on their agendas, and that this could be achieved by involving national and international training and resource centres and by the provision of training for trainers on these issues.

For relief and emergency organizations, it was considered that emergency support staff, in-country programme coordinators, communication officers and press officers would all benefit from training to raise awareness, provide specific information on minorities and their needs in the country or region, and training in strategies and methods. Materials to support training could be provided via a training manual including case studies, illustrations and strategies for good practice. It was thought to be helpful if a database of minority experts could be put together to supply organizations with trainers who are either knowledgeable on the general issues or are experts in minorities present in a country or region.

In summary, the workshop identified seven key areas which might bring positive results:

- Effective tools for relief organizations to identify communities and assess needs.
- A database of experts on relevant issues.
- Training of relief professionals in a variety of organizations.
- Networking meetings among experts and organizations.
- More consideration of how to choose local partners (with minorities in mind).
- Extending training to the wider society.
- Developing indicators for monitoring progress.

Conclusions

Saad Eddin Ibrahim of the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies, Egypt, summarized the outcomes of the seminar by isolating several themes common to the plenary and the workshops: a lack of awareness; a lack of access to what exists; a lack of will to give or receive; a lack of sufficient resources; a special set of responses identified in the recommendations; the need to involve the universal but use the particular; and the need for sharing of and participation in knowledge, experience and responsibility. He also identified a role that MRG might play arising from the discussions: as a source of information; a **solidarity base**; a network(er); an advocate; a catalyst and a trainer of trainers.

MRG gained a great deal through hosting this event, from confirmation that unmet training needs existed in certain areas and a discussion of concrete ways and means of meeting those needs, to a more in-depth discussion of what might be termed a 'philosophy of training'. We knew from the outset that we did not have the resources to provide all the training that might be needed and we were hoping to convince others to work with us. We may have had trainers or experts in mind but, from the feedback that we received, both informally and from evaluation forms, we found that some of those present who are from or work with minority communities will try to initiate training courses in their areas. This is a far better outcome than persuading other trainers to do this, since one of the main conclusions reached in this event was that training design and planning must involve those who are intended to benefit from it, and training commissioned by those who are to be trained will be more effective than most efforts originating outside the community. The success of many of these initiatives will depend on the resources (in terms of expertise, civil space and financial) being available.

Another clear conclusion was that training members of majority communities can improve the situation of minorities as much as, if not more than, training members of minority communities. MRG has worked on ways of influencing majority communities but has not characterized this as training. Taking this new approach could be both a challenging and rewarding departure.

Although much may also have been gained through participants meeting new people and building possible future partnerships, MRG is concerned that some concrete steps are taken to move from discussion to practice.

MRG will undertake the following to improve the availability and quality of training on minority rights and relief and minority issues:

- Review existing MRG minority rights training programmes, including those with our partners, to see whether they can be improved by incorporating the ideas and discussions in the workshop: such as the linkages between international, regional and local levels; supporting participants between training events; involving past trainees as trainers and in other capacities; and researching ways of reducing dependency on English in training (other than the training of bilingual trainers which MRG is already involved with).
- Support and encourage proposals from minority organizations to initiate new training programmes on minority rights in a region or country (depending on available resources and regional priorities set by MRG's International Council).
- Look at ways that MRG might involve training of majorities in our existing work on improving cooperation between communities.
- Publish the results of our research into the impact of conflict on children of minority and indigenous communities and ensure that it is widely disseminated among relief, development and emergency organizations.
- Convene seminars to raise awareness among target audiences of the difficulties of providing minorities with aid in conflict situations.
- Consider whether MRG can provide documented examples, experts, expertise, a training manual or other resources, to support governments, NGOs and international bodies who are aware of the exclusion of minorities from certain areas of relief work and would welcome support in tackling it.

List of participants

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Minority Rights Group

Minority Rights Group, an international human rights organization and registered educational charity, investigates the plight of minority (and majority) groups suffering discrimination and prejudice – and works to educate and alert public opinion.

We produce readable and accurate Reports on the problems of oppressed groups around the world. We publish six new and revised Reports a year. To date we have produced over 90 Reports, a *World Directory of Minorities*, several books and education packs.

MRG works through the UN and elsewhere to increase the awareness of human rights issues and – with your help – is supporting minorities in the international arena.

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Cover photo (left): ***Palestinian boy learning computing at a class in Ramallah on the occupied West Bank***
HOWARD J. DAVIES, PANOS PICTURES

MRG